



# REFLECTIONS

*on a Mission*



**2013 Annual Report**  
**North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council**

*Our cover photos are of former N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services consumers on the job: (l to r) Debra Davis, owner of Snazzies by Artware in Marshville; Chris Simpson, office manager at Van's Advertising in Burlington; and Wendy Long, customer service representative at State Farm Insurance in James City.*



# **REFLECTIONS** *on a Mission*

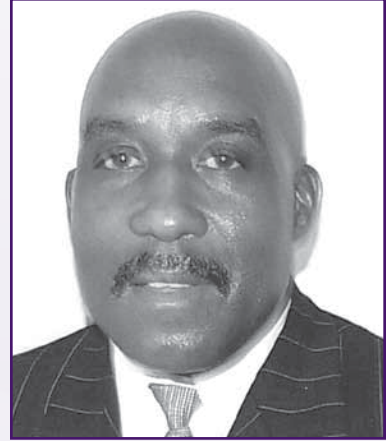
**2013 Annual Report**  
**North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council**

## Message from the Chair

On behalf of the North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and those we serve, I would like to thank you for your support of and interest in North Carolina's vocational rehabilitation services during 2013. It has been an active year for the council as we continue to fulfill our statutory responsibilities and roles as advocates for the rehabilitation needs of North Carolinians with disabilities.

During 2013, the council remained committed to the development and implementation of North Carolina's state plan and the triennial Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The consumer satisfaction survey was sent out monthly, and two public forums were held in the eastern and western regions of the state. You will find the council's participation in these areas detailed in this report.

The council was also active in statewide conferences aimed at conducting public outreach and the annual legislative breakfast to promote awareness of vocational rehabilitation services and the SRC.



Dennis Troy

The SRC's work continues to be guided by the four goals in our strategic plan:

- ▶ To advocate for adequate services and the community supports necessary for an individual to be successful in a program of services;
- ▶ To assist the NCDVRS with establishing goals and strategies to effectively address the needs identified by the triennial Comprehensive Needs Assessment;
- ▶ To inform all stakeholders of the role of the SRC and its advocacy efforts; and
- ▶ To enhance the SRC's knowledge of the needs of all of its stakeholders.

I am pleased to report on the work and accomplishments of the council and its committees this year. I would like to thank the council members for their dedication as advocates for all North Carolinians with disabilities.

Dennis Troy, Chair  
North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council

## The Mission of the Council

To enhance the employment, independent living and equality of individuals with disabilities in the state of North Carolina.

## The Purpose of the Council

- ▶ To advise and work in partnership with the N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NCDVRS).
- ▶ To assist the division in accomplishing its charge to promote employment and independence for people with disabilities through customer partnerships and community leadership.
- ▶ To provide guidance, input and recommendations relative to the development and expansion of vocational rehabilitation services and programs in an effort to maximize employment opportunities and independence for individuals with disabilities
- ▶ To advocate for legislation that supports individuals with disabilities in making successful transitions into the workforce and the community.
- ▶ To provide customers and stakeholders of vocational rehabilitation services with a formal mechanism to influence policy and the direction of NCDVRS at the highest administrative level of the state.

### The Year by the Numbers

- ▶ NCDVRS services helped 6,723 consumers achieve successful employment outcomes.
- ▶ Independent living objectives were achieved by 1,788 Independent Living program participants.
- ▶ The N.C. Assistive Technology Program provided 6,333 individuals with equipment loans or demonstrations.
- ▶ Disability Determination Services closed 209,746 cases involving Social Security Disability, Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid Disability benefits.
- ▶ Supported employment services resulted in 989 individuals achieving their employment objectives.



Chris Simpson  
Burlington



# N.C. State Rehabilitation Council Objectives

1. To carry out the following, after consulting with the state's Workforce Development Board: review, analyze, and advise the Designated State Agency (DSA) regarding the performance of the Designated State Unit (DSU) under this Title, particularly with responsibilities related to eligibility (including order of selection); extent, scope, and effectiveness of the services provided; and functions performed by state agencies that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving outcomes under this Title.
2. To carry out the following in partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services: develop, agree to and review state goals, and provide in accordance with Section 101(a)(15)(C); evaluate the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program; and submit reports of the progress to the Commissioner in accordance with Section 101(a) (15) (E).
3. To advise the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (DSA) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DSU) regarding activities authorized to be carried out under this Title and assist in the preparation of the State Plan and amendments to the Plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required by this Title.
4. To the extent possible, conduct reviews and analysis of the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with, the functions of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services: the vocational rehabilitation services provided by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and other public and private entities responsible for providing services to individuals with disabilities under the Act; and the employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under the Act, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes.
5. To prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner of RSA on the status of the vocational rehabilitation programs operating within the state and to make this report available to the public.
6. To avoid duplication of efforts and to enhance the number of individuals served.
7. Coordinate with the activities of other councils within the state, including: the Statewide Independent Living Council; the advisory panel established under Section 612(a) (21) of the Individuals with Disabilities Act Amendments of 1997; the state Council on Developmental Disabilities; the state Mental Health Planning Council; the state Workforce Investment Board; and other public and private organizations, groups, and functions such as the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation, the National Rehabilitation Association, and the N.C. Rehabilitation Association.
8. To provide for coordination and to establish working relationships between the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services and the Statewide Independent Living Council and the centers for independent living in the state.
9. To perform other functions consistent with the purposes of this Title comparable to other functions performed by the council.

# NCSRC Standing Committees

## Executive Committee

The Executive Committee acts on behalf of the council, consistent with the council's purpose as outlined in its bylaws. The committee is responsible for compiling the council's response to the state plan and triennial Comprehensive Needs Assessment, preparing the annual report, establishing meeting agendas and setting the general direction of the council and its committees.

In order to further expand SRC participation in the development and implementation of the state plan, the council's Executive Committee addresses state plan development, implementation and progress towards plan goals and SRC goals within the "Goals, Priorities and Strategies" section of the plan during monthly meetings with the NCDVRS director. The Executive Committee, along with the division's Planning and Evaluation Section, reports on the state plan to the full council at each quarterly meeting for their input and approval.

During its monthly meetings, the Executive Committee continued to work with the Planning and Evaluation Section on the development and implementation of the triennial Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The committee and section staff report back to the full council on the needs assessment at each quarterly meeting for their input and approval. The Executive Committee also maintains responsibility for developing the agendas for the quarterly full council meetings.

In the spring of 2013, SRC Chair Dennis Troy attended the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils Conference in Arlington, Virginia. Mr. Troy shared feedback with his fellow committee members on the importance of membership recruitment, reviewing state plans, providing input on agency policies and on the impending changes to the Workforce Investment Act.

As part of the SRC's strategic plan for 2010-2013, each N.C. legislator was sent consumer return-on-investment information customized for each of their districts along with consumer success stories. Distribution of the information coincided with the annual legislative breakfast sponsored by the N.C. Rehabilitation Association, an opportunity for SRC members to engage in positive dialogue with legislators.

Legislators viewed a video, "Part of Our Team," which reflected four employers' experiences with hiring people with disabilities served by the division. The North Carolina Assistive Technology Program demonstrated advancements in technology equipment that have improved the lives of people with disabilities by helping them achieve greater independence. Equipment demonstrations were on display at the General Assembly throughout the day.

To ensure due process for consumers of vocational rehabilitation services, committee members reviewed applications of candidates for hearing-officer positions. This responds to the need for additional hearing officers to efficiently handle the flow of client appeals. Two candidates were selected, and training will be conducted in FFY14 on federal regulations and state administrative procedure rules.



During the year, some consumers had been adversely affected by a policy change that discontinued division contributions to purchasing the unmodified-vehicle portion of consumers' vehicle modification packages. Committee members drafted a letter to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to request that individuals for whom a purchase had already been approved be granted an exception. As a result, each case already in process was carefully reviewed, and exceptions were granted on a case-by-case basis.

The Executive Committee advocates for strong leadership roles on the council and carefully reviews the membership terms and nominations of new members. New members are encouraged to serve on designated committees to provide more balanced representation. The committee produced an electronic annual report which was posted to the DVRS website and to the National Coalition for State Rehabilitation Councils' website. The report summarizes the work of the council and highlights essential components of its mission.

## Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee

The Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee reviews, analyzes and makes recommendations to the council on the effectiveness of rehabilitation services delivered by NCDVRS and other public and private agencies in the state.

The committee also gathers information using the consumer satisfaction survey, public forums and feedback from the Client Assistance Program. The committee accomplished several consumer-input tasks and continued to monitor the methods and strategies for input and outreach for 2013. The intent was to increase the voice of consumers and the public regarding the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services, thereby strengthening the quality of services for the citizens of North Carolina. Committee members advocated for sharing consumer satisfaction survey feedback with field offices to improve customer service. The information was distributed to unit managers and posted on the agency's internal website.

At the committee's recommendation, the division also expanded its methods of obtaining feedback on consumer satisfaction by making the survey available through a website address provided by email and with the written survey. Over 500 individuals who did not respond to the written survey were subsequently reached through telephone surveys.

In addition, the committee, with full council participation, focused on gathering input through public forums. The two forums, held in Wilmington and Concord, allowed consumers, providers, employers, stakeholders and division staff to express concerns and highlight how services have or have not met existing needs.

The committee intends to use the feedback from these forums as a guide in the development of the statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment and agency policies and procedures and in formulating goals and strategies for the 2014 State Plan.



Wendy Long  
James City

## Policy and Rules Review Committee

The Policy and Rules Review Committee reviews and makes recommendations relating to division policy and procedures that affect the public, are subject to public rule-making hearings under the state's Administrative Procedures Act, or both.

In the past year, the committee provided feedback on policy revisions pertaining to the following topics: comparable benefits; concurrent records of service policy; case service authorizations; 1281 budget suspension; telecommunications; the parental consent letter; eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services; vehicle purchase contributions; vehicle modifications/repair purchases; medical consultants; security privacy policy directive; transportation needs and community-based assessments.

Members were notified of the completed training phases of the new BEAM case management system. The project has involved extensive interface among the Division of Services for the Blind, Division of Services for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, as well as external entities involved with coordination of these agencies' services.

## Community Outreach, Advocacy, Member Development

The council continues its involvement with seven liaison groups that require SRC involvement, as well as special interest groups. There are council members who are designated to serve as council representatives. The council continues to focus on identifying potential members who can effectively liaise with the groups. Involvement is seen as a critical opportunity to partner with key stakeholders, as well as provide strategic paths for community outreach, advocacy and SRC member development. The seven groups are:

- ▶ Council on Education Services for Exceptional Children
- ▶ Mental Health Planning Council
- ▶ N.C. Substance Abuse Federation
- ▶ N.C. Council on Developmental Disabilities
- ▶ N.C. Statewide Independent Living Council
- ▶ N.C. Commission on Workforce Development
- ▶ Commission for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse

An ongoing information exchange between stakeholder groups has helped to educate members in each realm. In October, as part of Disability Employment Awareness Month, Duke Energy's Disability Outreach and Inclusion Team (DO-IT) hosted a resources fair in Raleigh. Participants from Easter Seals/UCP, Special Olympics, N.C. Diabetes Association, The ARC of NC, DVRS and other programs networked to learn more about each others' programs and resources throughout the state. SRC members and the staffs of the Client Assistance Program



and DVRS were on hand to answer questions from the public and Duke Energy employees.

## Public Forums

To obtain consumer input beyond the satisfaction survey and email links via the division's website, the council conducted two public forums, in the eastern and western regions of the state. At the May 15 forum in Wilmington, advocates expressed interest in improving dialogue with agency staff and the methods of informing clients about job opportunities.

Concern was expressed that jobs offered by local employers are often at lower pay. A need was expressed for more work-incentive benefit specialists around the state. The division has hired five work-incentive benefits specialists to address this need.

At August's forum in Concord, a discussion arose over the lack of research and resources for people with disabilities transitioning back into society, especially those with traumatic brain injuries. The division responded that there was a pending request for applications for the expansion of services for individuals with brain injuries, including veterans and others attempting a transition into employment. Other resources noted as lacking are apprenticeships for trade skills and a resource guide for consumers and their families to assist in navigating the array of available services.

The following day the council discussed ways to address these concerns. Also, regional division staff were invited to share issues, concerns and accomplishments. The forums continue to serve as a valuable way to obtain consumer input and increase awareness of the SRC's advocacy role in ensuring that the needs of the consumer and agency are met.

## SRC Member Training

At an orientation session, new members were informed of opportunities to participate in online training specific to state rehabilitation councils. Members also attended training sessions at the N.C. Rehabilitation Association/N.C. Assistive Technology Program Conference in Concord.

DVRS staff presented members with information on the latest initiatives in the areas of developmental and physical disabilities, brain injury and vocational evaluation. Benefits specialists stressed the importance of educating consumers on financial investing and accumulating assets. Through investments in home and vehicle modifications, consumers are able to live more independently in their communities. Staff noted that individuals with disabilities are increasingly engaged in training, and becoming employed, in the high-demand areas of software simulation and video-game development.

At their December meeting, DHHS Deputy Secretary Sherry Bradsher met with the full council and shared information about the department's aim to improve Medicaid services by helping ensure better access — providing the right services at the right time to serve the whole person.

# Review and Analysis of the Client Satisfaction Survey

The consumer satisfaction survey is mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, which requires the State Rehabilitation Council to conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of and client satisfaction with:

- ▶ the functions performed by the designated state agency;
- ▶ vocational rehabilitation services provided by state agencies and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities under the act;
- ▶ and employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under this title, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes.

**Survey Process:** The survey is conducted by the SRC in cooperation with division staff. Council and staff share responsibility for analyzing and reporting the results.

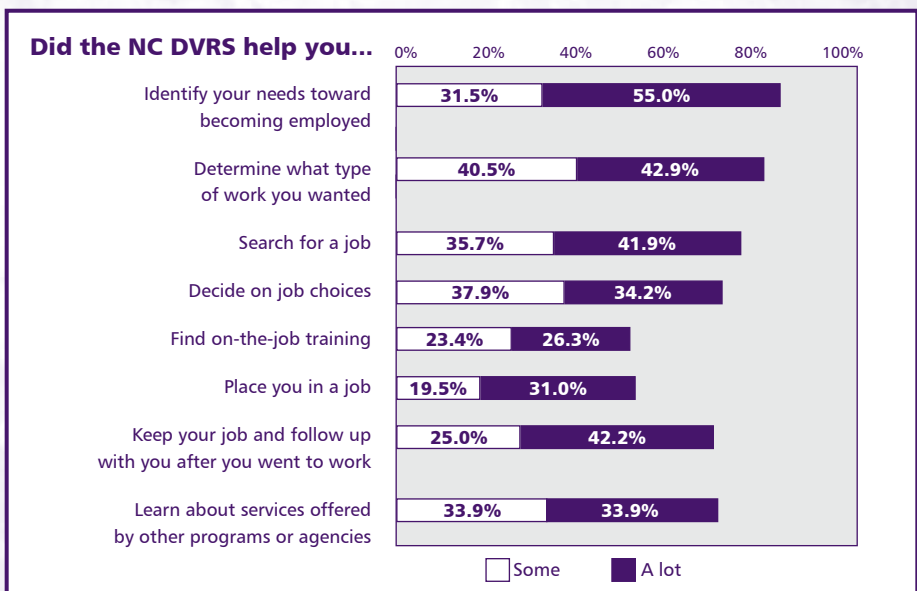
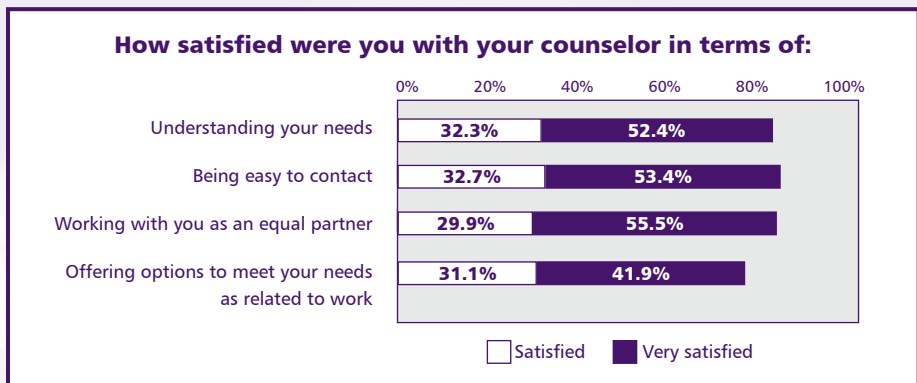
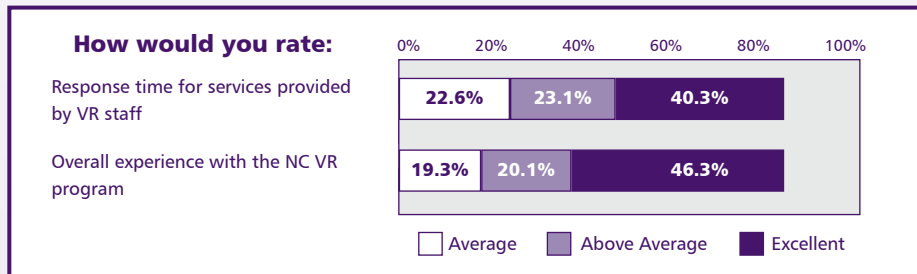
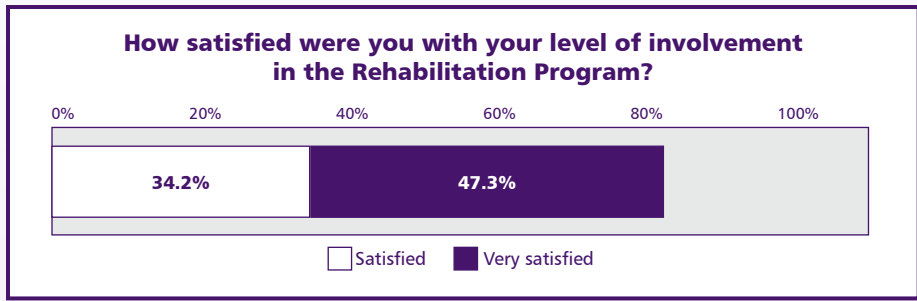
For FFY13, surveys were sent to former division consumers who were closed either as successfully rehabilitated in employment or, after services were provided, not successfully rehabilitated. Three methods of communication were used to collect survey data: an email invitation with a link to an online version of the survey, a questionnaire with a self-return address and prepaid postage, and random telephone calls. No-cost efforts, specifically additional telephone surveys and online surveying, helped increase the number of completed surveys over the previous year.

Of the 11,368 survey forms mailed: 1,113 were completed and returned; 180 were completed online; and 581 telephone surveys were completed by N.C. State University's Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services. There were 1,288 mail-outs returned due to incorrect mailing addresses. The numbers of surveys completed was 1,874, the largest response since 2002.

**Overview of Survey:** To make it more user-friendly, the questionnaire was redesigned for FFY13. While there was no change to overall content, the survey is now comprised of seven items designed to: (1) identify who is completing the questionnaire, whether the actual consumer with or without help, a family member or a caregiver; (2) measure the consumer's experience with the vocational rehabilitation program; (3) determine whether the consumer had received information about the Client Assistance Program and been informed of their right to appeal division decisions; (4) measure consumer satisfaction with their rehabilitation counselor; (5) determine their level of involvement in their rehabilitation program; (6) determine what factors, if any, prevented the consumer from working; and (7) measure consumer satisfaction with response time and overall satisfaction with the VR program.



The following charts reflect the 2013 survey's measures of consumer satisfaction.



## Recommendations Related to the 2014 N.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Plan

The Executive Committee provided input to the division on the progress of the 2013 state plan goals as well as the development of 2014 State Plan. The council recommended the following to the division relating to the identification of goals, priorities or strategies for FFY14:

**Recommendation:** In support of its strategic plan for legislative advocacy, the council recommended again that the division prepare customized reports for each N.C. legislative district reflecting the return on investment that the VR program produces with its consumer expenditures in the districts.

**Division's Response:** The division again produced the reports along with success stories that provided a human dimension to the data. The reports were prepared and distributed to all N.C. legislators a month earlier than the previous year.

**Recommendation:** To more strongly demonstrate the value of the division's offering self-employment as a viable outcome option, the council recommended, in addition to reflecting a consumer's earnings increase, developing a method to represent indirect benefits — for example, positive impact on mental health status, number of hospitalizations and levels of community engagement.

**Division's Response:** The division supports this recommendation and during FFY14 plans to work with the division's self-employment specialist, the Planning and Evaluation section, interested council members and others to develop such an instrument and an implementation plan.

**Recommendation:** The council recommended that the division submit a request to the DHHS legislative liaison to advocate for a change to state statute to bring the mileage reimbursement rate in line with the federal IRS standard rate for travel related to meeting attendance and participation in council business.

**Division's Response:** The division submitted the recommended changes and is awaiting action on the proposal.

**Recommendation:** The council recommended that, at each of its quarterly full council meetings, the Client Assistance Program present an activity update. Further, the council recommended that a standardized set of questions and topic areas be provided as a guide for regional directors and unit managers to provide updates on local-office activities, developments and concerns.

**Division's Response:** The division has incorporated the recommendation.

**Recommendation:** The council recommends continuing to conduct twice annual consumer-input sessions with the division to collect input from communities across the state.

**Division's Response:** The division supports these sessions as one way to assess how well the division is addressing the state's vocational rehabilitation needs.

**Recommendation:** The council recommends that the division continue to assess the intake and eligibility determination process to determine how it might be streamlined and made as uniform as possible so that consumers can more clearly understand service eligibility requirements and what they can do to help expedite their rehabilitation process.

**Division's Response:** The division will continue to review the process, especially as it implements the new electronic casework management system and evaluates the need for further adjustments.

**Recommendation:** To enable members to participate in council meetings to the greatest extent possible, the council has recommended that the division explore alternative meeting methods, such as remote call-in or other forms of distance participation.

**Division's Response:** The division supports this recommendation and will continue to work with council members to identify technological solutions that will enable their remote participation.

# The Members of the North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council: 2012-13

<b>Dennis Troy</b> <b>Chair</b>	Disability Advocacy Groups
<b>Celeste Hunt</b> <b>Vice Chair</b>	Directors of Projects Under Section 121
<b>Davan Cloninger</b>	Disability Advocacy Groups
<b>Meg Ackley</b>	Regional Rehabilitation Centers for the Physically Disabled
<b>Quintin Boston</b>	Non-Division Rehabilitation Counselors
<b>Doreen Byrd</b>	Parent Training and Information Centers
<b>Robert Gilmore</b>	NCDVRS Consumers
<b>Trish Hussey</b>	Disability Advocacy Groups
<b>John Marens</b>	Client Assistance Program (CAP)
<b>Ping Miller</b>	N.C. Chamber of Commerce
<b>Laurie Ray</b>	State Education Agency (IDEA)
<b>Brenda Savage</b>	N.C. Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions
<b>Carol Walker</b>	Regional Rehabilitation Centers for the Physically Disabled
<b>Lisa Ward-Ross</b>	Community Rehabilitation Service Providers
<b>Vacant</b>	Business and Industry Sector
<b>Vacant</b>	Business and Industry Sector
<b>Vacant</b>	Disability Advocacy Groups
<b>Vacant</b>	Labor
<b>Vacant</b>	Statewide Independent Living Council

## Non-Voting Members

<b>Elizabeth Bishop</b> <b>Director</b>	N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
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## Counselor Advisory Committee

<b>Kenny Gibbs</b>	Statewide
<b>Melanie Harrington</b>	Central Region
<b>Collis Niro</b>	Eastern Region
<b>Vacant</b>	Western Region

### 2013 Meeting Schedule

- |                    |            |
|--------------------|------------|
| ▶ Feb 28 - March 1 | Raleigh    |
| ▶ May 15 - 16      | Wilmington |
| ▶ August 29 - 30   | Concord    |
| ▶ December 12 - 13 | Raleigh    |

# REFLECTIONS

## *on a Mission*



## N.C. State Rehabilitation Council

c/o N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

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State of North Carolina | Pat McCrory, Governor  
Department of Health and Human Services | Aldona Z. Wos, M.D., Secretary  
[www.ncdhhs.gov](http://www.ncdhhs.gov)

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